

Gautama the Buddha

the Man Who Rescued Humanity from Death and Destruction

[Vesak Message 2003]

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This is the message of Buddhism to all mankind on the 2547th anniversary of the birth and enlightenment of the Buddha.

The full moon day of the month of May every year marks the birth and enlightenment of a young Sakyan of North Indian origin named Siddhartha Gautama more than two and a half millennia ago. These two events in his life are separated by thirty five years of fruitful activity. All events in his life are down to earth and take place here amidst humans in the Gangetic valley of India.

At the age of twenty nine, young Siddhartha, with a deeper sensitivity to the realities of the human body like its inherent weaknesses of decay, disease and death and its emotional tribulations like greed, hatred, jealousy and rivalry, felt the need to reduce the pain of these in humans and ultimately eliminate these disturbances, at both levels of the physical and the psychical. It is this endeavour to liberate the humans of these distressing realities of human existence that earned him the title of Lord of Compassion on becoming the Buddha.

He also needed transcendental wisdom to reach his goal of liberation from human bondage, like the men who needed scientific knowledge to send tons of metal from this earth into outer space. The acquisition of this wisdom in the life of Siddhartha, through his own diligent application, is what we call enlightenment. It earned him the title of Buddha. The mission of the Buddha was to impart this

knowledge to all mankind, irrespective of caste, creed or regional differences. He knew of no chosen people.

The profundity of the Buddha's teaching and its universal applicability got the message of Buddhism across Asia from east to west, well before the dawn of the Christian era. In its early centuries, Buddhism was known on the western side in Afghanistan and Iran. On the east, travelling across Central Asia through the famous Silk Routes, it reached China by 50 A.D. Ere long it was well received in Korea and Japan. There was never a need to raise a sword or shed a drop of blood for its propagation.

The Buddha does not claim to be a saviour. He makes known to the world the way to liberation he discovered as a human. He is only a leader among men. Each one of us has to develop to the full our own human potential, through personal culture of moral goodness at a down to earth level of wholesome interpersonal relationships. This category of moral goodness in Buddhism specifically includes respect for life of all grades, of every living thing, respect for the ownership of legitimately earned and acquired wealth and possessions, mutually respectful behaviour towards the genders, both male and female, honesty in word and deed in social transactions and the need to safeguard one's sanity of judgement at all times by keeping away from infatuation brought about through the use of alcohol and drugs. Buddhism accepts and insists on these as vital ingredients, with no divine sanctions under any circumstances, for the harmonious growth of humans in the home and society as well as for friendly and respectful relations among nations and at international global levels.

Based on this, Buddhism advocates personal psychic development called mind culture or *bhāvanā*. It is not a mere exercise in regulated breathing. The word meditation is vaguely used today for this. But the process necessarily involves nurture, growth and development of man to a higher level of culture which liberates him from his human bondage, through his clarified vision or

wisdom to a new level of attitudes and aspirations. This process of religious culture in Buddhism undoubtedly calls for a regular, but an equally well indispensable process of spiritual and religious discipline and restraint, a willing abandonment of the lower for the sake of the higher. This is what Buddhism stands for, any time any where in any body's hands.



Thoughts for the Vesak Full Moon Day - 2003

Professor Dhammavihari Thera

Sukho Buddhānaṃ uppādo. Blissful is the appearance of Buddhas in the world. Since Sakyamuni Buddha Gotama appeared in India more than twenty five centuries ago, the life he lived for full forty five years as Buddha, and the message he delivered to mankind as a whole, knowing fully well their oneness as humans as well as their strengths and weaknesses, has convincingly impacted the world from the Caspian Sea in the West to the Japanese archipelago in the East.

That is why the pious and appreciative people of Afghanistan, nearly two thousand years ago, in their moods of sanity and wisdom, created for mankind the colossal Buddha statues of Bamiyan. Those Buddhas shall be there eternally in the world. Who else could those original settlers of Afghanistan have been except pious and practising Buddhists? Historical and archaeological evidence has established this beyond any reasonable doubt.

What the world has learnt of the value and worth of Buddhism through these monuments, created within five hundred years or so of the appearance of the Master can never be effaced from the world of humans, wherever they shall be,

China, Korea and Japan in the Far East or the Middle East regions of Western Asia. History and historians will always remember them, whether H.G.Wells, Sri Jawaharlal Nehru or any other.

It is on a Vesak Full Moon Day like this that the world had the blessing of the birth of our Buddha aspirant as the son of a provincial Sakyan ruler named Suddhodana. We rejoice over it today. Buddha belonged by lineage to an agricultural community who were more keen on preserving their personal purity and their cultural identity. The Buddha had no intention of establishing a kingdom of any sort, here or elsewhere.

Buddhism indeed grew out of such a rich cultural background. Human values were learnt at a very down-to-earth level, through contact from person to person. That is what *maitrī* or *mettā* really means. This is essentially the worth of Buddhism. We do not need to guard ourselves against personal disasters in our day to day life or against our own moral decay **behind a heavenly shield**.

Let me now give you a message or two from Buddhism which are invaluable to every one of us wherever we live. Ethnic, political and religious labels do not stand on our way. Walls that divide shall be torn down and gates that shut out shall be thrown open as I speak to you on this day. We humans have to be identified as being in one single arc, whether that be of Noah or any other, from history or legend. Let us reckon our own human worth and human goodness and live up to it.

When Buddhism says ' Be ye all physically and mentally alert and be ever ready for action. Waste not a moment of it ' in such a phrasing as *Uttitthe na ppamajjeyya*, note sensibly the validity of that message extensively for all mankind, through time and space. Its serious observance pays great dividends. These precious words are the earliest ever uttered in history with regard to conservation of time. These injunctions can be observed and lived through without any denominational tags.

Take yet another thought. Develop loving kindness and thoughts of good will towards all life in the world, man and animal, limitless and timeless, in the way that a mother loves her one and only child: ***mātā yathā niyaṃ puttāṃ āyusā ekaputtamanurakkāhe***. Let the birth of the Buddha, well and truly be a blessing to mankind.

